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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Be Fire Conscious this Fourth of July

Helena, Mont.—The Fourth of July holiday is considered the holiday full of camping, celebrating with friends and family, and especially, fireworks. However, as dry conditions continue to plague Montana, the potential for wildland fires this Fourth of July exist. The right conditions mixed with careless campers and residents could spell disaster.

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Montana State Fire Chief's Association, Montana Fire Warden's Association, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service are asking Montanans to enjoy the holiday but to be especially careful when enjoying the out of doors.

"Dry weather, gusty winds and low humidity levels are all that is needed for a spark to ignite dry grass and other fuels," stated Paula Nelson of the Forest Service. Everyone celebrating the Fourth of July holiday should take precautions when using fireworks and campfires, as both are a major cause of wildland fires in Montana.

"We realize people don't intend to ignite fires when using fireworks, however, restricting their use to safer areas can reduce the chance of that happening," explained Nelson. "We are asking the public to please use fireworks in a legal, safe area that is free of grass, pine needles for flammable materials." **The use of fireworks is prohibited on all Forest Service, State Lands, or other designated closed areas unless written authorization is obtained from the recognized fire protection agency. The agencies also remind Montanans they can be held responsible for any fire suppression costs that are a result of negligent use of fireworks or campfires.**

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In addition to the potential of wildland fires, the agencies want parents and children alike to be aware of the dangers of using fireworks. Fireworks cause numerous injuries each year. "We are especially concerned about young people and fireworks," stated Nelson. "Sparklers appear to be harmless enough, however, they generally burn around 1800 degrees Fahrenheit, hot enough to burn a child's hand or arm and cause permanent damage. We are asking everyone to please be careful. If you plan to make fireworks a part of your Fourth of July celebration, please play it safe!"

Along with fireworks safety, the agencies urge everyone to tend to their campfires. "Fireworks and recreational fires, with the fuel buildup and dry conditions that exist right now, are a dangerous mix. If folks are conscientious; making sure no fire is unattended, keeping flammable materials away from open flames and ensuring they have a shovel, axe and bucket in their possession, will go along way in ensuring that we have a holiday free of disaster," Nelson said.

For more information regarding the use of fireworks or campfires on Montana's forested lands, please contact your local DNRC, Forest Service, or BLM office for more information.

For more information regarding fire conditions or restrictions, log onto the Montana Wildland Fire Information site at: www.opi.state.mt.us/wildlandfire/ or <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrcq/fireseason/2003/MTmain.htm>

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Remember, only you can prevent wildfires.

Keep Montana Green!